

1st Pan NE India all Communities Festival “The Guwahati Carnival 2014”

CONCEPT NOTE

PEACE



The 1st Pan NE India all Communities Festival labelled "The Guwahati Carnival 2014" with the slogan "Go Go Go.Haathi" presents to the world a plethora of cultural dances, music, special performances from NE talents, unlimited entertainment and serious fun with a purpose: To promote Peace & Understanding among diverse cultures and ethnic communities living in NE region in order to create an environment conducive for growth of business and entrepreneurship.



Guwahati, the cosmopolitan city of NE India, will come alive for three days to the sound of folk & rock music, enchanting sights & visuals of traditional culture, fashion parades & dances, cultural parades and the aroma & taste of ethnic cuisines. This fest is an attempt by community leaders, concerned citizens and entrepreneurs to bring together all communities living in the 8 NE sister states, to celebrate the cultural diversity under a common platform, hitherto celebrated exclusively. Through the carnival the culture of various ethnic groups in the NER will be showcased to the general public, out of the confines of the community or the in-group, to the world at large.

The coming together of myriad and diverse ethnic groups living in the NER to celebrate an inclusive ONE (one North East) festival such as this is envisaged to forge a strong fraternal bond and cross cultural understanding in the coming years. Such alliances, friendship and camaraderie develop by interacting and knowing each other better. Micro-interactions and building bridges through shared activities and festival bring about communal harmony and peace within and without, and thus, empower NE people to withstand the test of minor differences and diverse divisive forces. The fest is not exclusive but inclusive as it is not owned by the communities hailing from NE India only but rather it includes all Indians

living in the NER. The carnival theme is painted on a larger inclusive canvas encompassing all those who want to have good fun and be a part of the festivities in Guwahati. However, in our attempt to promote the NE culture, brotherhood and communal understanding within the NER, the festival's outlook and scope could become myopic and exclusivist. Through the fest, NE people will reach out and welcome our brethrens from outside of our region and encourage celebs, cultural troupes, singers, dancers and other talents from regions of India other than NE to participate. Such gesture will ensure greater understanding and cultural integration; thus, bringing closer the people of NER with the rest of India.

The fest will also be an occasion to celebrate the life of the great sons and daughters of NE India who have made NER and the country proud in sports, literature, films, business, entrepreneurship and other diverse fields. Various NE celebs, musicians, talents and sports stars of the ilk of Bhaichung, Lou Majaw, Zubin Garg, Obed Zeme, Sourabhee Debbarman, Somdev Debbarman, Mami Varte, Borkung Hrangkhawl, Papon, Mary Kom, Shiva Thapa, legendary rock band – Phynyx (formerly Phoenix of Manipur) would be brought on board to give the brand "Enchanting Northeast India" the visibility it deserves so as to enable the state tourism departments to attract tourists in a big way. Tourism in general and "Peace Tourism" in particular could evolve as one of the main drivers to kick-start inflow of investments/FDI. This will provide the much needed impetus for growth and progress in NER. The much hype "Look East policy", once it materializes, could make NER the engine of growth for the entire country by 2020 plus. But this will remain an unrealized dream pregnant with endless possibilities if entrepreneurship and business in the NER is not nurtured in an environment of understanding, peace and harmony among various diverse ethnic tribes and races living in the NER. Lack of inter and intra community understanding could otherwise leave NE people divided on ethnic lines and set up one group against the other and so on and so forth.

We believe a shared fest, a common platform, ONE festival that belongs to all irrespective of colour, caste, creed, sex and the place of birth would be pivotal in creating the much needed inter-community understanding and provide a peaceful environment for business to thrive.

The 8 sister states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura are collectively called Northeast Region (NER) or NE India. Located in the easternmost part of India, its geographical isolation, difficult terrain and distance remains a challenge for infrastructure development and doing business. However, the region's remoteness could become a blessing in disguise for nature and wellness tourism with most part of NER remaining untouched still in its pristine state of natural beauty. NER is a land of diversity not only of flora and fauna (biodiversity hotspot) but also is inhabited by over 220 diverse ethnic groups and almost equal number of dialects. The vast diversity in terms of languages spoken, geographical landscape, soil, custom and culture contributes to the rich heritage of the NE India. Looking at the diversity found within the region, within a single community and within each state; the very concept of NE India as a single entity is a misnomer for a few arrogant intellectuals. However, the fraternal bond shared by the NE people, their way of life, their hopes and despair, problems and common destiny in some mysterious manner gives the people a sense of common identity which cannot be easily dismissed or overlooked.

The name assigned to this region remains perplexing to most NE Indians, as it is with many who are new to the historical anomalies as to why the NE India was called the north-east even though it lies to the extreme east. Could it be that the region got its name by dint of its location to a place accorded greater importance by both the British and the present dispensation? Some historians opined that being located to the north east of erstwhile united Bengal, the name North-east of Bengal was used to denote the region and it has since then retain the tag "northeast". Perhaps, it could be the genesis of the feeling of 'in -

betweenness' and marginalization ingrained in the minds of many NE Indians. Four regions of a country – the Northern, Southern, Eastern and Western region occupies a certain strategic place in the geopolitics of a country. But by dint of being named "the NE India" for convenience sake or otherwise, many in the region attribute this as one of the causes of marginalization in matters of policy-making. Therefore, the tag NE India conjures up a sense of neglect and distance to many NE Indians. No matter what is said or unsaid about geopolitics and whether policy makers give a wider representation and importance to the region in future remains to be seen. The operationalization of Look East policy into measurable gains for the people of the region could, perhaps, put an end to the misgivings most living in the region carry. Notwithstanding the name NEI and the diversity found within the region; the person hailing from NE India identifies with the term "NE Indians". We are all 'Indians first', however, we also simultaneously recognize our shared identity as Northeasterners/ NE Indians. As the region seeks for ways and means to surge forward and become an integral part of the developmental process within a larger paradigm, the "Look East Policy" provides a fillip to the many gaps the region is cursed with. Look east policy of the Govt. of India is gaining traction in the realm of policy making and economy of our nation and remains crucial for the growth of NE India. The spinoff gains from the policy could be more domestic and foreign tourist heading to the region either for adventure and cultural/ peace tourism, leisure or for business with NE or South East Asia through NE.

Guwahati, being the gateway to the entire NE, would be pivotal in the realizing the vision of Look East policy and is poised to grow into a strategic cosmopolitan city/metropolis due its diverse population mix unlike its sister cities in the region. The city is a melting pot for all communities. It is believed that drawing tourist to Guwahati is akin to guiding them further on to the other enchanting places and people in other sister states. Inasmuch as the carnival provides an avenue for fun and

festivities, display of culture of the east and promotion of tourism, it will also imbibe the much needed openness and inclusive culture within NE communities and also equipped the residents with the much needed skills, warmth and openness to embrace tourist coming to our region. Tourism is identified as one of the main drivers for growth and for converting the Look East policy into tangible benefits in matters of economic and infrastructure development for the region.

The NE India, as we know today, has always been a microcosm of India's "unity in diversity" or a mini India where diverse ethnicity, culture, food and festivals exist, but it remains united by a strand of commonness and similarities which exemplifies the spirit of oneness and unity amid diversity. NE people living in mainland India or abroad invariably overcome their innumerable diversities and differences and have come to see themselves as NE Indians regardless of where they come from (the states they hail from). This feeling of NE Oneness is more pronounced among NE college students (esp. erstwhile RECs) and generally among students studying in the same universities outside NER. Shared likes and dislikes, prejudices and marginalization suffered at the hands of a few half-baked educated fellow Indians from other parts of India forged this solid solidarity and friendship among them helping them to overcome their narrow cultural differences, state boundaries and food habits. Students, working professionals and people from the 8 states unites and amalgamates into one fraternity called NE students/ people group, though they may have their tribe or state base associations. However, a strange regional mind-set sets them apart as soon as they land in their own region which is perplexing and an undesirable development that needs to be arrested. In this context, of all the cities in the NER, Guwahati presents an opportunity for re-engineering social dynamics and for carrying out unifying social entrepreneurship projects aim at nullifying these divisive mind-sets and disintegrating forces.

The rich cultural heritage of NE comes alive in myriad colours and splendour in festivals

celebrated by different communities in Guwahati. However, it has never reached an audience beyond the very community/revellers of the said festival. Even festivals seems to have envelop itself into well-defined boundaries - each tribe/community has their own festival; the festivals, at best, is celebrated only as a community festival, state festival or region specific festival. For instance, KUT would ring a bell to any Chin Kuki Mizo people, a Bihu for Assamese, a hornbill would somehow be perceived to be a Kisama based Nagaland tribes festival and the Sanggai seems to join the ranks of state festivals though its participation has not crossed the city limits of Imphal and so on. The moot point here is what's stopping us from coming closer and create common platforms where all can participate and have fun together. We can build a better future for ourselves if we walk together. Like it or not we can't ignore that we share a common destiny". For instance, no matter how different or highly you think of yourself, for most commoners in mainland Indian cities will probably be mistaken for a person hailing from Nepal or closer home "Assam". Many of our mainland brothers do not know where Manipur or Nagaland is or how different or similar a Naga is from a Manipuri, a Bodo from a Kuki and so on. This confusion stems from our near likeness in looks, attitude and way of life. This can become a rallying point for a united front for the people of the region. It's time to permeate those artificial cultural walls we erect in our own backyards and allow different tribes and people to share and start thinking and living as "oNE" i.e. One North East. This inclusive fest could perhaps act as a catalyst for breaking barriers and for bringing communities closer to their shared destiny. The 'Guwahati Carnival 2014' is designed to draw people of NE India under oNE platform through a shared festival. It remains a small first step towards cultural integration, peace and solidarity of the entire region.

The tag line: "Go, Go Go.haathi" created for the carnival stands for a festival sans boundaries and the need to work swifter for socio-economic development. This is the time

for taking a healthy break from Lahe Lahe culture or Hayeng Culture. “Go, Go, go.Haathi” is corrupted form of Go Guwahati meant to shout out for progress, let the economy run, no more strolls. Haathi meaning Elephant in Hindi is synonymous to a slow growing steady Indian economy. The event will have a day dedicated for pep talk on business, entrepreneurship promotion and sharing of experiences from successful entrepreneurs and start-up firms in order to help out local entrepreneurs who could become instrumental in making “look east policy” a reality. With NE India strategically located to leverage its geographical advantage, it could harness its potential once the Look east policy kicks-in dividends as promised. With the expectation that the region could someday become the engine of growth for the country’s economy, promotion of entrepreneurship remains an important element of the festival. ‘Go Go Go.haathi’ is a chant coined by the event developers to inspire entrepreneurship from the region.

The carnival is envisaged to create social and economic benefits in measurable terms as highlighted below:

- **Promote tourism** – State Tourism departments and Boards will be given stalls for promotion of places of interest in their states to domestic and international tourist.
- **Give the Brand ‘Guwahati’ a boost** by creating a Guwahati - based common fest which will register the city as a place to be, a happening place for tourist worldwide.
- **Give a platform to talents in Guwahati and NER** to unleash their potential and garner support.
- **Promote music and sports** as a viable career option by giving sportspersons and musicians across the region their due.
- **Promote food tourism**: NER is blessed with close to over 220 plus ethnic cuisines.
- **Promote entrepreneurship** by giving entrepreneurs a chance to meet up, seek advice and funds, listen to live-talks from

angel investors and successful entrepreneurs; thereby, creating a supportive ecosystem where businesses, entrepreneurship and technology thrive.

- **Create an opportunity** for various communities to interact and establish lasting bonds of friendship for communal harmony and peace
- **An annual Carnival** will prominently place Guwahati in the world tourist map and the city could evolve as the nerve Centre to channel further movement of tourist to other cities and places of interest in the NE since Guwahati is the gateway of NE India.
- **Creates an opportunity** for all communities living in NER and Guwahati in particular to showcase their cultural dresses, dances and folk songs of their community to co- brethren communities in the NE, tourists who are expected to come to the region for the carnival each year and audiences worldwide through livestreaming. Feeds will be available LIVE through internet live streaming.
- **Coordinate and create a festival tourism circuit** involving all stakeholders using the PPP mode.

The proposed events and programmes for the Carnival is presented below:

- **PARADE** of cultural dance troupes, sportspersons and performers and interested school children only from Panjabari Road to Shilpgram. (This year PARADE may be restricted to within SHILPGRAM)
- 2. **Cultural Dances** from all tribes and communities from the NE. (As far as possible, invitation will be sent out to all communities, focus is on Guwahati & interested cultural troupes for 2014)
- 3. **Folk songs and exhibition** of ethnic dresses, rare handicrafts, handlooms, paintings and traditional musical instruments
- 4. **Food Festival** – Ethnic and modern customized cuisines.

5. Support and Felicitate sports people, talents, entrepreneurship and craft persons.

6. Music Festival – Rock shows from established stars from the region such as Lou Majaw, Len Gangte – Phynyx, Obed Zeme, Borkung Hrangkhawl, Mami Varte etc and other upcoming music bands and performance from upcoming talents.

7. Battle of the Choirs and community participative dance such as Thabal Chongba style, cultural dance and Vannoï laam and various festive shouts, for instance, Li li li Ho Ho of Kut etc, will be incorporated into the programme to make the event participative. The shout of “Go, Go Go.haathi/guwahati” will be used to set the tempo for the community style celebrations.

8. Carnival mask/colors and merchandise related to the carnival will be prominently used.

9. Competitions, contests and quizzes will be organized for students, rock bands, musicians

Concept Note on the 1st PAN North East India (NEI) Mega festival ‘The Guwahati Carnival 2014’

Concept note is written by Pu Lenn Chongloui, CEO, TECHKNOWLOGIZ Advisory Services Pvt . Ltd (TAS) in support of TAS Social Entrepreneurship Project called “The LostCraft” and our concern for peace and harmony in the region. All rights are reserved and the no part of the document may be reproduced without duly acknowledging the originator/ author.

TECKNOWLOGIZ